# Palaeontological Impact Assessment for the proposed R33 Witklip Road upgrade, northwest of Modimolle, Limpopo Province

**Desktop Study (Phase 1)** 

For

**Beyond Heritage (Pty) Ltd** 

07 April 2023

**Prof Marion Bamford** Palaeobotanist P Bag 652, WITS 2050 Johannesburg, South Africa <u>Marion.bamford@wits.ac.za</u>

### **Expertise of Specialist**

The Palaeontologist Consultant: Prof Marion Bamford Qualifications: PhD (Wits Univ, 1990); FRSSAf, mASSAf Experience: 34 years research and lecturing in Palaeontology 26 years PIA studies and over 350 projects completed

### **Declaration of Independence**

This report has been compiled by Professor Marion Bamford, of the University of the Witwatersrand, sub-contracted by Beyond Heritage (Pty) Ltd, Modimolle, South Africa. The views expressed in this report are entirely those of the author and no other interest was displayed during the decision making process for the Project.

Specialist: Prof Marion Bamford

MKBamfur

Signature:

#### **Executive Summary**

A Palaeontological Impact Assessment was requested for the proposed upgrade of the R33 Witklip Road, from Modimolle to Witklip, a distance of 13 km, Limpopo Province.

To comply with the regulations of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) in terms of Section 38(8) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act No. 25 of 1999) (NHRA), a desktop Palaeontological Impact Assessment (PIA) was completed for the proposed development.

The proposed site lies on the moderately sensitive Swaershoek and Alma Formations (Nylstroom Subgroup, Waterberg Group) that might preserve trace fossils such as microbialites in the quartzites. Therefore, a Fossil Chance Find Protocol should be added to the EMPr. Based on this information it is recommended that no further palaeontological impact assessment is required unless fossils are found by the contractor, environmental officer or other designated responsible person once excavations, drilling or construction activities have commenced. Since the impact will be low, as far as the palaeontology is concerned, the project should be authorised.

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### 1. Background

The proposed R33 road upgrade commences just outside Modimolle Town at km 0.6 and ends at km 13.6 at Witklip. The road traverses an easy rolling to flat terrain. From km 4.6 to km 6.2 the speed is reduced due to the very sharp horizontal curves. This section is hilly (commonly referred to as the "pass").

The total length of the project is approximately 13.0 km and the study area corridor for the assessment should be 40m from the centre line of the road (Figures 1-2).

Currently, the R33-13 is a single carriageway road with one lane per direction. There are 0.3m to 0.5m paved shoulders with one climbing lane from km 4.6 to km 6.2. There is only one bridge along the route that will be upgraded. This is called here Bridge No. 1. It is the Klein Nyl River Bridge (at km 1.120). There are several intersections along the R33 that will be upgraded, as well as 21 culverts for drainage that will be upgraded.

A Palaeontological Impact Assessment was requested for the R33 Witklip Road upgrade project. To comply with the regulations of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) in terms of Section 38(8) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act No. 25 of 1999) (NHRA), a desktop Palaeontological Impact Assessment (PIA) was completed for the proposed development and is reported herein.

Table 1: National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998) (NEMA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations, 2014 (as amended) - Requirements for Specialist Reports (Appendix 6).

	A specialist report prepared in terms of the Environmental Impact Regulations of 2017 must contain:	Relevant section in report
ai	Details of the specialist who prepared the report,	Appendix B
aii	The expertise of that person to compile a specialist report including a curriculum vitae	Appendix B
b	A declaration that the person is independent in a form as may be specified by the competent authority	Page 1
с	An indication of the scope of, and the purpose for which, the report was prepared	Section 1
ci	An indication of the quality and age of the base data used for the specialist report: SAHRIS palaeosensitivity map accessed – date of this report	Yes
cii	A description of existing impacts on the site, cumulative impacts of the proposed development and levels of acceptable change	Section 5
d	The date and season of the site investigation and the relevance of the season to the outcome of the assessment	N/A

	A specialist report prepared in terms of the Environmental Impact Regulations of 2017 must contain:	Relevant section in report
е	A description of the methodology adopted in preparing the report or carrying out the specialised process	Section 2
f	The specific identified sensitivity of the site related to the activity and its associated structures and infrastructure	Section 4
g	An identification of any areas to be avoided, including buffers	N/A
h	A map superimposing the activity including the associated structures and infrastructure on the environmental sensitivities of the site including areas to be avoided, including buffers;	N/A
i	A description of any assumptions made and any uncertainties or gaps in knowledge;	Section 5
j	A description of the findings and potential implications of such findings on the impact of the proposed activity, including identified alternatives, on the environment	Section 4
k	Any mitigation measures for inclusion in the EMPr	Section 8, Appendix A
1	Any conditions for inclusion in the environmental authorisation	N/A
m	Any monitoring requirements for inclusion in the EMPr or environmental authorisation	Section 8, Appendix A
ni	A reasoned opinion as to whether the proposed activity or portions thereof should be authorised	Section 6
nii	If the opinion is that the proposed activity or portions thereof should be authorised, any avoidance, management and mitigation measures that should be included in the EMPr, and where applicable, the closure plan	Sections 6, 8
0	A description of any consultation process that was undertaken during the course of carrying out the study	N/A
р	A summary and copies of any comments that were received during any consultation process	N/A
q	Any other information requested by the competent authority.	N/A
2	Where a government notice gazetted by the Minister provides for any protocol or minimum information requirement to be applied to a specialist report, the requirements as indicated in such notice will apply.	N/A

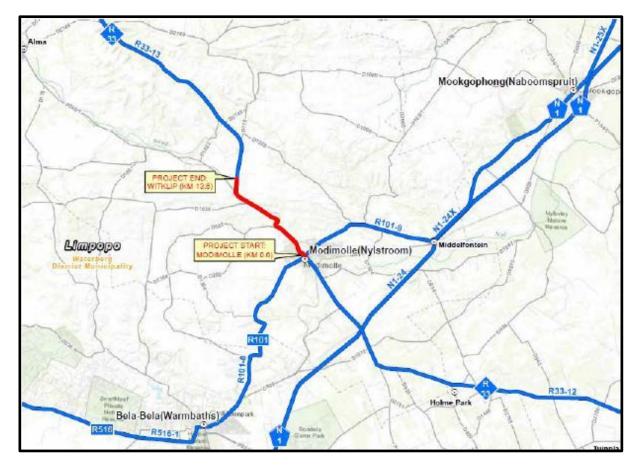


Figure 1: Locality map of the general area to show the R33 Witklip Road section to be upgraded and the relative landmarks. The upgrade project is shown by the red line.

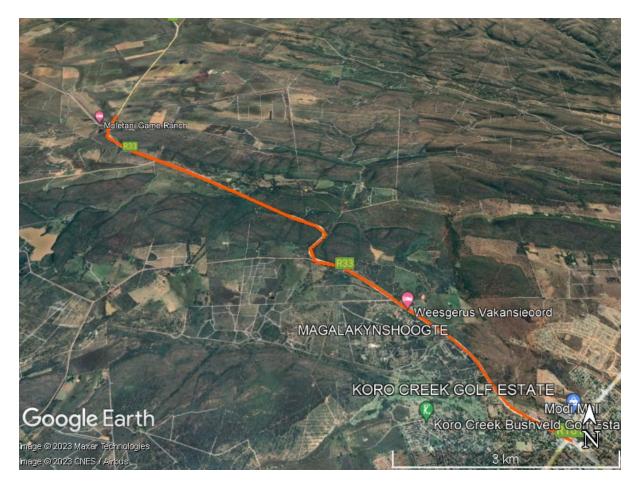


Figure 2: Google Earth Map of the proposed R33 Witklip Road upgrade project with the section shown by the orange line.

### 2. Methods and Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for this study were to undertake a PIA and provide feasible management measures to comply with the requirements of SAHRA.

The methods employed to address the ToR included:

- 1. Consultation of geological maps, literature, palaeontological databases, published and unpublished records to determine the likelihood of fossils occurring in the affected areas. Sources include records housed at the Evolutionary Studies Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand and SAHRA databases;
- 2. Where necessary, site visits by a qualified palaeontologist to locate any fossils and assess their importance (*not applicable to this assessment*);
- 3. Where appropriate, collection of unique or rare fossils with the necessary permits for storage and curation at an appropriate facility (*not applicable to this assessment*); and
- 4. Determination of fossils' representivity or scientific importance to decide if the fossils can be destroyed or a representative sample collected (*not applicable to this assessment*).

### 3. Geology and Palaeontology

i. Project location and geological context

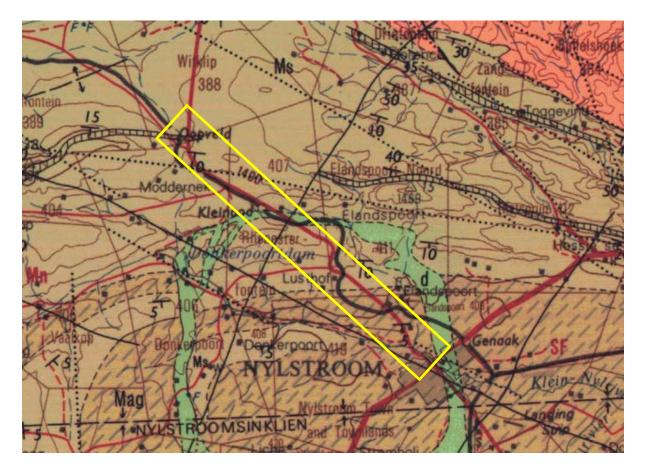


Figure 3: Geological map of the area around the R33 from Modimolle to Witklip. The location of the proposed project is indicated within the yellow rectangle. Abbreviations of the rock types are explained in Table 2. Map enlarged from the Geological Survey 1: 250 000 map 2428 Nylstroom.

Table 2: Explanation of symbols for the geological map and approximate ages (Barker et al., 2006; Corcoran et al., 2013; Simpson et al., 2013). SG = Supergroup; Fm = Formation; Ma = million years; grey shading = formations impacted by the project.

Symbol	Group/Formation	Lithology	Approximate Age	
di	diabase	Intrusive volcanic rock diabase	Post ca 2050 Ma Palaeoproterozoic Ca 2000 Ma	
Mag	Alma Fm, Nylstoom Subgroup, Waterberg SG	Feldspathic and micaceous sandstone, greywacke, grit, mudstone, siltstone and conglomerate		
Ms	Swaershoek Fm, Nelspruit Subgroup, Waterberg SG	Medium to coarse- grained sandstone, pebble sandstone, tuff- greywacke	Palaeoproterozoic Ca 2000 Ma	

The project lies in the Nylstroom Basin. The Palaeoproterozoic rocks of southern Africa occur in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Gauteng Provinces and extend westwards into Botswana, and occur in three basins. Three main strata are recognised, the Soutspansberg Group, the Waterberg Group and the Blouberg Formation. A number of attempts have been made to correlate the strata in the different basins, the Waterberg Basin, the Soutpansberg Basin and the Middelburg Basin.

The Waterberg Group occurs in the Waterberg and Nylstroom Basins (Barker et al., 2006) and rests unconformably on rocks of the Transvaal Supergroup and the Bushveld Complex. It is overlain by Karoo Supergroup rocks. Three subgroups are recognised throughout the main Waterberg Basin but only the oldest subgroup occurs in the Nylstroom Basin. Different formations are noted in the south, southwest and central areas compared to the North, northeast and central areas according to SACS, (1980). The three subgroups are the Nylstroom Subgroup that has been divided into the lower Swaershoek Formation and upper Alma Formation. The Langkloof Formation or series is an old name. The Matlabas Subgroup is the middle stratum and has been divided into two formations in each of the southern parts and the northern parts, namely the Skilpadop and Aasvolkop Formations in the former area and the Setloale and Makgabeng Formations in the northern part. The upper Kransberg Subgroup has three formations in the southern part (Mogalawena, Cleremont and Vaalwater Formations).

The Nylstroom Basin has only the basal Nylstroom Subgroup and this is divided into the lower **Swaershoek Formation** and the **Alma Formation**.

The Waterberg Group was deposited between 2000 and 1700 million years ago, well after the Great Oxidation Event (GOE, ca 2.5 Ga) so oxygen was available and these shallow water deposits are known as red beds (Figure 3). The Nylstroom and Matlabas Subgroups form a crude upward-fining sequence with rudites and arenites at the base and grading to lutites and well-sorted arenites at the top. The overlying Kransberg Subgroup forms a second, similar, upward-fining sequence in the Waterberg Basin (Barker et al., 2006).

#### ii. Palaeontological context

The palaeontological sensitivity of the area under consideration is presented in Figure 4. The site for development is in the Nylstroom Subgroup of the Waterberg Group.

The Waterberg Group sandstones represent four phases of sedimentary infilling of the three ancient basins. There is some evidence for periodic arid conditions indicated in the Makgabeng Formation from the dunes and cross-bedding, and the braided streams channel sandstones in the Mogalakwena Formation (Corcoran et al., 2013). In contrast, Simpson et al. (2013) advocate the presence of microbial mats using the terminology of Noffke et al. (2001). Microbial activity is recognised by the very subtle sedimentary structures such as roll-up structures, sand cracks, wrinkle structures, tufted microbial mats, biological soils crusts and gas-escape features. These structures have only been found in the Makgabeng Formation but the SAHRIS palaeosensitivity map, based on the Palaeotechnical Report for Limpopo (Groenewald et al., 2014), suggests that they may be more widespread.

Microbialites (sensu Burne and Moore, 1987) are organo-sedimentary deposits formed from interaction between benthic microbial communities (BMCs) and detrital or chemical sediments. In addition, microbialites contrast with other biological sediments in that they are generally not composed of skeletal remains. Archean carbonates mostly consist of stromatolites. These platforms could have been the site of early O2 production on our planet. Stromatolites are the laminated, organo-sedimentary, non-skeletal products of microbial communities, which may have included cyanobacteria, the first photosynthetic organisms to produce oxygen. Another type of trace fossil has been termed Microbially-induced sedimentary structures (MISS sensu Noffke et al., 2001) or simply 'fossil mats' (sensu Tice et al., 2011). These include swirls, rip-ups, crinkled surfaces and wrinkles that were formed by the mucus extruded by littoral algae or microbes and bound together sand particles. Davies et al. (2016) caution against the assumption that all such structures are microbially induced unless there is additional evidence for microbes in the palaeoenvironment.

Nonetheless, stromatolites and microbialites are accepted as trace fossils of algal colonies. MISS could be microbially or abiotically formed. The oldest stromatolites have been recorded from the Barberton Supergroup that was deposited between 3.55 to ca. 3.20 Ga, and stromatolites still form today in warm, shallow seas (Homan, 2019).

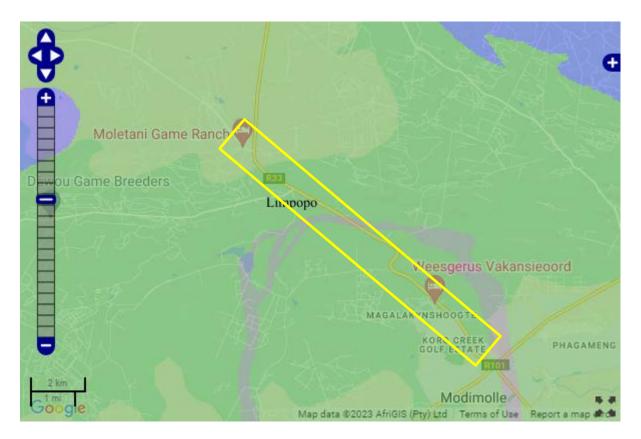


Figure 4: SAHRIS palaeosensitivity map for the site for the proposed R33 Witklip Road upgrade shown within the yellow rectangle. Background colours indicate the following degrees of sensitivity: red = very highly sensitive; orange/yellow = high; green = moderate; blue = low; grey = insignificant/zero.

From the SAHRIS map above the area is indicated as moderately (green) for the Waterberg Group and with no sensitivity (grey) for the diabase.

#### 4. Impact assessment

An assessment of the potential impacts to possible palaeontological resources considers the criteria encapsulated in Table 3:

PART A: DEFINITION AND CRITERIA				
	H	Substantial deterioration (death, illness or injury). Recommended level will often be violated. Vigorous community action.		
	М	Moderate/ measurable deterioration (discomfort). Recommended level will occasionally be violated. Widespread complaints.		
Criteria for ranking of the SEVERITY/NATURE of environmental	L	Minor deterioration (nuisance or minor deterioration). Change not measurable/ will remain in the current range. Recommended level will never be violated. Sporadic complaints.		
impacts	L+	finor improvement. Change not measurable/ will remain in the urrent range. Recommended level will never be violated. poradic complaints.		
	M+	Moderate improvement. Will be within or better than the recommended level. No observed reaction.		
	H+	Substantial improvement. Will be within or better than the recommended level. Favourable publicity.		
Criteria for ranking	L	Quickly reversible. Less than the project life. Short term		
the DURATION of	Μ	Reversible over time. Life of the project. Medium term		
impacts	Н	Permanent. Beyond closure. Long term.		
Criteria for ranking	L	Localised - Within the site boundary.		
the SPATIAL SCALE	Μ	Fairly widespread – Beyond the site boundary. Local		
of impacts	Н	Widespread – Far beyond site boundary. Regional/ national		
PROBABILITY H Definite/ Continuous		Definite/ Continuous		
(of exposure to	Μ	Possible/ frequent		
impacts) L Unlikely/seldom		Unlikely/ seldom		

#### Table 3b: Impact Assessment

PART B: Assessment		
CEVEDITY /NATUDE	Н	-
SEVERITY/NATURE	Μ	-

PART B: Assessment				
L		Soils and sands do not preserve fossils; so far there are no records from the Alma and Swaershoek Fms of trace fossils such as microbialites this region so it is very unlikely that fossils occur on the site. The impact would be negligible		
	L+	-		
	M+	-		
	H+	-		
	L	-		
DURATION	Μ	-		
	Н	Where manifest, the impact will be permanent.		
SPATIAL SCALE	L	Since the only possible fossils within the area would be trace fossils in the sandstones, the spatial scale will be localised within the site boundary.		
	Μ	-		
	Н	-		
	Н	-		
	Μ	-		
PROBABILITY	L	It is extremely unlikely that any fossils would be found in the loose soils and sands that cover the area or in the sandstones that might be drilled or blasted. Nonetheless, a Fossil Chance Find Protocol should be added to the eventual EMPr.		

Based on the nature of the project, surface activities may impact upon the fossil heritage if preserved in the development footprint. The geological structures suggest that the rocks are either much too old to contain body fossils but might have trace fossils of early microbes or microbial activity. Since there is an extremely small chance that trace fossils may occur in the Nylstroom Subgroup and may be disturbed, a Fossil Chance Find Protocol has been added to this report. Taking account of the defined criteria, the potential impact to fossil heritage resources is extremely low.

### 5. Assumptions and uncertainties

Based on the geology of the area and the palaeontological record as we know it, it can be assumed that the formation and layout of the dolomites, sandstones, shales and sands are typical for the country and only some might contain trace fossils, fossil plant, insect, invertebrate and vertebrate material. The overlying soils and sands of the Quaternary period would not preserve fossils.

### 6. Recommendation

Based on experience and the lack of any previously recorded fossils from the area, it is extremely unlikely that any fossils would be preserved in the overlying soils and sands of

the Quaternary. There is a very small chance that trace fossils such as microbialites may occur in the sandstones Proterozoic Nylstroom Subgroup (the Swaerskraal and Alma Formations) so a Fossil Chance Find Protocol should be added to the EMPr. If fossils are found by the contractor, environmental officer or other responsible person once clearing of vegetation, excavations or drilling have commenced then they should be rescued and a palaeontologist called to assess and collect a representative sample. The impact on the palaeontological heritage would be very low, so as far as the palaeontology is concerned, the project should be authorised.

#### 7. References

Barker, O B., Brandl, G., Callaghan, C.C., Erikssen, P.G., van der Neut, M., 2006. The Soutpansberg and Waterberg Groups and the Blouberg Formation. In: Johnson, M.R., Anhaeusser, C.R. and Thomas, R.J., (Eds). The Geology of South Africa. Geological Society of South Africa, Johannesburg / Council for Geoscience, Pretoria. Pp 301-318.

Burne, R.V., Moore, L.S., 1987. Microbialites; organosedimentary deposits of benthic microbial communities. Palaios 2(3), 241-254.

Corcoran, P.L., Bumby, A.J. and Davis, D.W., 2013. The Paleoproterozoic Waterberg Group, South Africa: provenance and its relation to the timing of the Limpopo orogeny. Precambrian Research, 230, 45-60.

Davies, N.S., Liu, A.G., Gibling, M.R., Miller, R.F., 2016. Resolving MISS conceptions and misconceptions: A geological approach to sedimentary surface textures generated by microbial and abiotic processes Earth-Science Reviews 154, 210–246.

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Homann. M., 2019. Earliest life on Earth: Evidence from the Barberton Greenstone Belt, South Africa. Earth Science Reviews 196, 102888.

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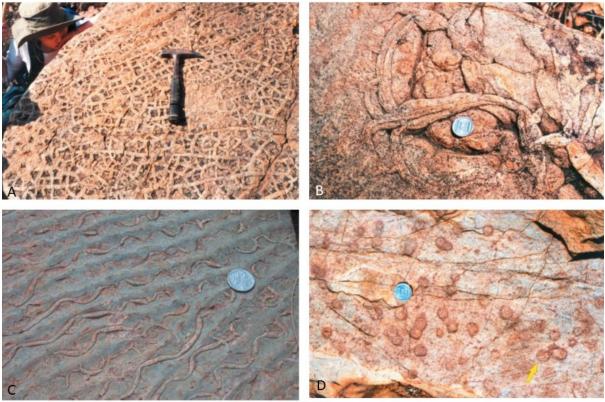
Simpson, E.L., Heness, E., Bumby, A., Eriksson, P.G., Eriksson, K.A, Hilbert-Wolf, H.L., Linnevelt, S., Malenda, H.F., Modungwa, T., Okaforba, O.J., 2013. Evidence for 2.0 Ga continental microbial mats in a paleodesert setting. Precambrian Research 327, 36-50.

Tice, M.M., Thornton, D.C.O., Pope, M.C., Olszewski, T.D., Gong, J., 2011. Archean Microbial Mat Communities. Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences 39, 297–319.

### 8. Chance Find Protocol

# Monitoring Programme for Palaeontology – to commence once the excavations / drilling activities begin.

- 1. The following procedure is only required if fossils are seen on the surface and when drilling/excavations commence.
- 2. When excavations begin the rocks and discard must be given a cursory inspection by the environmental officer or designated person. Any fossiliferous material (trace fossils, plants, insects, bone or coal) should be put aside in a suitably protected place. This way the project activities will not be interrupted.
- 3. Photographs of similar fossils must be provided to the developer to assist in recognizing the fossil plants, vertebrates, invertebrates or trace fossils in the shales and mudstones (for example see Figure 5). This information will be built into the EMP's training and awareness plan and procedures.
- 4. Photographs of the putative fossils can be sent to the palaeontologist for a preliminary assessment.
- 5. If there is any possible fossil material found by the developer/environmental officer then the qualified palaeontologist sub-contracted for this project, should visit the site to inspect the selected material and check the dumps where feasible.
- 6. Fossil plants or vertebrates that are considered to be of good quality or scientific interest by the palaeontologist must be removed, catalogued and housed in a suitable institution where they can be made available for further study. Before the fossils are removed from the site a SAHRA permit must be obtained. Annual reports must be submitted to SAHRA as required by the relevant permits.
- 7. If no good fossil material is recovered then no site inspections by the palaeontologist will be necessary. A final report by the palaeontologist must be sent to SAHRA once the project has been completed and only if there are fossils.
- 8. If no fossils are found and the excavations have finished then no further monitoring is required.
- 9. Appendix A Examples of fossils from the Waterberg Group



Magaliesberg Fm trace fossils, near Pretoria (all from Bosch & Eriksson, 2008): A – cracks,. B – sinuous structure, C – *Manchuriphycus*, D – circular structures. R1 coin for scale.

Figure 5: Photographs of trace fossils generally referred to as microbialites. As seen in the field.

### 10. Appendix B – Details of specialist

### Curriculum vitae (short) - Marion Bamford PhD January 2023

Present employment:		Professor; Director of the Evolutionary Studies Institute. Member Management Committee of the NRF/DSI Centre of Excellence Palaeosciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa	
Telephone	:	+27 11 717 6690	
Cell	:	082 555 6937	
E-mail	:	<u>marion.bamford@wits.ac.za ;</u>	
marionbamford12@	marionbamford12@gmail.com		

#### ii) Academic qualifications

Tertiary Education: All at the University of the Witwatersrand: 1980-1982: BSc, majors in Botany and Microbiology. Graduated April 1983. 1983: BSc Honours, Botany and Palaeobotany. Graduated April 1984. 1984-1986: MSc in Palaeobotany. Graduated with Distinction, November 1986. 1986-1989: PhD in Palaeobotany. Graduated in June 1990.

#### iii) Professional qualifications

Wood Anatomy Training (overseas as nothing was available in South Africa): 1994 - Service d'Anatomie des Bois, Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, Belgium, by Roger Dechamps

1997 - Université Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris, France, by Dr Jean-Claude Koeniguer 1997 - Université Claude Bernard, Lyon, France by Prof Georges Barale, Dr Jean-Pierre Gros, and Dr Marc Philippe

#### iv) Membership of professional bodies/associations

Palaeontological Society of Southern Africa Royal Society of Southern Africa - Fellow: 2006 onwards Academy of Sciences of South Africa - Member: Oct 2014 onwards International Association of Wood Anatomists - First enrolled: January 1991 International Organization of Palaeobotany – 1993+ Botanical Society of South Africa South African Committee on Stratigraphy – Biostratigraphy - 1997 - 2016 SASQUA (South African Society for Quaternary Research) – 1997+ PAGES - 2008 – onwards: South African representative ROCEEH / WAVE – 2008+ INQUA – PALCOMM – 2011+onwards

#### v) Supervision of Higher Degrees

All at	Wits	University
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Degree	Graduated/completed	Current
Honours	13	0
Masters	13	3
PhD	13	7
Postdoctoral fellows	14	4

#### vi) Undergraduate teaching

Geology II – Palaeobotany GEOL2008 – average 65 students per year Biology III – Palaeobotany APES3029 – average 25 students per year Honours – Evolution of Terrestrial Ecosystems; African Plio-Pleistocene Palaeoecology; Micropalaeontology – average 12 - 20 students per year.

#### vii) Editing and reviewing

Editor: Palaeontologia africana: 2003 to 2013; 2014 – Assistant editor Guest Editor: Quaternary International: 2005 volume Member of Board of Review: Review of Palaeobotany and Palynology: 2010 – Associate Editor: Cretaceous Research: 2018-2020 Associate Editor: Royal Society Open: 2021 -Review of manuscripts for ISI-listed journals: 30 local and international journals

#### viii) Palaeontological Impact Assessments

25 years' experience in PIA site and desktop projects

- Selected from recent projects only list not complete:
- Skeerpoort Farm Mast 2020 for HCAC
- Vulindlela Eco village 2020 for 1World
- KwaZamakhule Township 2020 for Kudzala
- Sunset Copper 2020 for Digby Wells
- McCarthy-Salene 2020 for Prescali
- VLNR Lodge 2020 for HCAC
- Madadeni mixed use 2020 for Enviropro
- Frankfort-Windfield Eskom Powerline 2020 for 1World
- Beaufort West PV Facility 2021 for ACO Associates
- Copper Sunset MR 2021 for Digby Wells
- Sannaspos PV facility 2021 for CTS Heritage
- Smithfield-Rouxville-Zastron PL 2021 for TheroServe
- Glosam Mine 2022 for AHSA
- Wolf-Skilpad-Grassridge OHPL 2022 for Zutari
- Iziduli and Msenge WEFs 2022 for CTS Heritage
- Hendrina North and South WEFs & SEFs 2022 for Cabanga
- Dealesville-Springhaas SEFs 2022 for GIBB Environmental
- Vhuvhili and Mukondelei SEFs 2022 for CSIR
- Chemwes & Stilfontein SEFs 2022 for CTS Heritage
- Equestria Exts housing 2022 for Beyond Heritage
- Zeerust Salene boreholes 2022 for Prescali
- Tsakane Sewer upgrade 2022 for Tsimba
- Transnet MPP inland and coastal 2022 for ENVASS
- Ruighoek PRA 2022 for SLR Consulting (Africa)
- Namli MRA Steinkopf 2022 for Beyond Heritage

#### ix) Research Output

Publications by M K Bamford up to January 2022 peer-reviewed journals or scholarly books: over 170 articles published; 5 submitted/in press; 14 book chapters. Scopus h-index = 31; Google Scholar h-index = 39; -i10-index = 116 based on 6568 citations.

Conferences: numerous presentations at local and international conferences.